

Völkerrechtsblog

Der Blog des Arbeitskreises junger Völkerrechtswissenschaftler*innen

≡ Navigation



PRACTITIONER'S CORNER

Practitioner's Corner: MONUSCO – an inside view into a peacekeeping mission

IGOR NGIMA — 24 August, 2015



0



The “Practitioner’s Corner” gives the floor to practicing international lawyers. Their accounts illustrate the diversity of work within the field of international law and offer personal insights into the practice of international law.

Igor Ngima

If it's not written down, it does not exist

In those words, I can sum up what I've learned over the past two years working for the UN. It also perfectly captures the basics of working in the humanitarian/human rights field. My name is Igor Ngima, I am 28 years old and I graduated from the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human rights in 2012. I have spent the last two years working in the field of human rights and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in various capacities with international organizations in my home country Cameroon and in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). I was successively a human rights fellow with the regional office of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Central Africa (2013-2014) and a Senior Protection Assistant at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) during the CAR crisis in early 2014.

I recently took up a job as a human rights officer with the MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization in the Democratic Republic of Congo), a peacekeeping mission established in the DRC some 15 years ago. My main daily tasks boil down to the monitoring of the human rights situation in my geographic area of responsibility, documentation of human rights violations as well as training of relevant stakeholders (including MONUSCO's military component, government actors, civil society organizations). I am based in the Eastern DRC, an extremely tense region ravaged for years by a non-international armed conflicts between the government of DRC (in some instances jointly with the MONUSCO Force Intervention Brigade) and several armed groups. The security situation is so intense at times that I had to spend the first three months of my assignment living and sleeping in the UN compound.

My background in public international law and specifically in IHL, human rights and refugee law is definitely an asset in my day-to-day work. This work spans from writing analytical reports, briefing notes or thematic papers to advocacy activities with local and international partners. Mastering the international legal definitions of a refugee, an internally displaced person, torture or minorities is essential in providing adequate protection responses in the field. However, over time, I have come to realize that theoretical concepts very often go unheeded for operational reasons. It is for example easier to classify all allegations of abductions under the heading “enforced disappearances” whether or not those acts are attributable to state or non-state actors. International law enables me to grasp the gaps (in terms of people’s ability to confront legal concepts with field operational needs) humanitarian actors have to fill by constantly referring to international standards.

As a human rights officer, you often have to collect information related to cases of human rights violations in order to document and enter those into a database. Liaising with judicial authorities, monitoring detention centers, designing contingency plans for civilians ahead of military operations are at the heart of my current position. Besides, my daily routine includes cross-checking allegations of human rights violations and ensure compliance during military operations with the human rights due diligence policy. Carrying out these tasks in such a nerve-racking security context poses different types of dilemmas that you constantly have to unravel.

How do you grapple with reality and find enough inner strength and motivation to do your job when twice in less than five months UN vehicles and personnel have been

subject to attacks by local people bewildered by years of killings? How do you carry on when on a weekly basis, you have to work on cases of victims whose lips or ears have been cut off with machetes for no apparent reason? Those are questions that haunt me sometimes... and I've only been around for 6 months. The benefit of such missions is how many amazing, positive, resourceful and prescient people you get to encounter in the field, people who have been through far worse than what I've experienced and still see the best in humanity. Over time, a career in the field will probably be the most challenging experience both professionally and personally but the rewards and lessons learned are unparalleled in any other field.

The opinions expressed in this text are those of the author alone and do not represent or reflect the views of the United Nations or MONUSCO.

ISSN 2510-2567

Tags: Human Rights, International Humanitarian Law, Peacekeeping, United Nations



Print



Facebook



Twitter



Email

Related

Practitioner's Corner:
Project management -
the missing part in law
books
9 December, 2015
In "Practitioner's
Corner"

Practitioner's Corner:
Working for Peace in
Afghanistan
6 October, 2014
In "Practitioner's
Corner"

A Pebble in the Shoe:
Assessing International
Uses of Do No Harm
15 October, 2014
In "Discussion"

PREVIOUS POST



The Proportionality Critique Still Stands

NEXT POST

Reforms of the World Health Organization in light
of the Ebola crisis in West Africa: More delegation,
more teeth?



No Comment

Leave a reply

Logged in as ajv2016. Log out?

SUBMIT COMMENT

☐ Notify me of follow-up comments by email.

☐ Notify me of new posts by email.